

LOSFA LOOP

March 2013 Edition Volume 6-3

From the Desk of the Executive Director



Melanie Amrhein

In Louisiana this time of year, it's hard to decide if it's still winter or if spring has sprung. All I know is I'm tired of being wet.

March is the same for financial aid offices. It's time to draw the current year to a close and begin processing for the upcoming one. We hope that our 7th annual College Goal Sunday event helped get the new year underway. We are pleased to report that over 350 families participated at our 13 locations across the state. Over 100 volunteers, in addition to 38 Trailblazers participated in making this event a success. Thanks so much for your dedication to students and families!

March has traditionally been the peak FAFSA processing month. To reach even more first time FAFSA filers, LOSFA is proud to be invited, along with LASFAA, to join LELA and the Louisiana Women's Legislative Caucus to present a FAFSA Completion Webinar at noon on Tuesday, March 12. This first time webinar will be aimed at high school seniors, their parents, and their counselors to give guidance in getting the FAFSA done correctly and to ensure access to the most aid programs available.

Louisiana Connect continues to grow by leaps and bounds, and now boasts over 90,000 active accounts! The TOPS Tracker has been launched and is live so students now have access to monitor their progress towards their TOPS award from 8th through 12th grade. LOSFA is currently working with Board of Regents and other stakeholders in the portal to develop a public landing page from which general financial aid and college access information will be available to populations that cannot log in. The public landing pages will offer guidance and information for audiences such as grandparents, college students, adults wanting to complete college or training

after an absence from school, new students who may have been out of high school for a time and want to make career changes, individuals in the workforce who are seeking retraining, or home study/home schooled students. Be on the lookout as LOSFA joins with Board of Regents to promote this via an exciting "Geaux to College" campaign in the coming weeks.

I hope you have reviewed and are drafting your 2013-14 Go Grant packaging policy for your campuses. We are acutely aware of the changes this program has made, but with limited state funding for this program, we must strive to make the most of the dollars to ensure student access and success. The structure was intentionally designed to give the schools as much latitude as possible to fit their student population. LOSFA representatives will be available at the Spring LASFAA Conference to answer your questions regarding all our programs and plans are underway to offer additional guidance on Go Grant through meetings, webinars and bulletins.

On a final note, you should have received information from our Scholarship/Grant Division regarding the shortfall in the TOPS appropriation. Currently, sufficient funding is not on hand to cover all invoices received to date. Therefore, TOPS billings for which adequate funding is not available will be held until additional funding is appropriated to LOSFA. We are working with the Office of Planning and Budget to expedite this process.

Here's hoping March will bring drier days, warmer temperatures and an additional TOPS appropriation!

Melanie

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College Goal Sunday Serves 360 Louisiana Families

The Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA) and the Louisiana Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (LASFAA) hosted another successful College Goal Sunday statewide event on February 24, 2013.

Louisiana's sixth annual College Goal Sunday, which was held at thirteen locations around the state, was attended by 360 families. Parents and students across the state were offered free assistance from financial aid professionals in completing the primary student financial aid form, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

Attendees were also given information about available sources for college financial aid, as well as an overview of Louisiana Connect, the state's online college and career access portal.

Funding for Louisiana College Goal Sunday was provided by the College Access Challenge Grant and a grant from USA

LOSFA's Scholarships and Grants Director Deborah Paul addresses the College Goal Sunday audience at Southern University in Baton Rouge.

College Goal Sunday \$500 Scholarship Winners:

Jordan Gabrielach, Amite High School
Ashley Warner, Wossman High
Steven Williams, Denham Springs High School
Reed Romero, Westgate High School
Krystal Dupree, Central Lafourche High School
Hannah Myles, Cedar Creek High School
Bianca Jones, Woodlawn (Baton Rouge) High School
Trevor DeRouer, Gueydan High School
Chelsea Bazile, Light City High School
Odessa Hale, E.D. White Catholic High School
Rachel Bordelon, Marksville High School
John Hood, Word of Life High School
Melanie Long, DeLaSalle High School

Funds. Thanks to these funds, one student attendee from each of the 13 locations won a \$500 scholarship. LOSFA was also able to award a \$500 scholarship to one of the 38 Trailblazer volunteers who helped staff the event. Volunteers also included Professional School Counselors and members of the Council of Student Body Presidents.

As a special College Goal Sunday value-added benefit at the Baton Rouge Community College site, representatives of the Louisiana Jump\$tart Coalition were in attendance and provided valuable information on financial and school resources and money management tips for parents and soon-to-be first-time college students. All attendees received the Jump\$tart Playbook which included a budget sheet, tips on avoiding predatory lending and credit card debt, and a discussion sheet for a parent/student talk about money matters. Jump\$tart plans to expand their participation to additional College Goal Sunday sites in 2014.



Above: Jordan Gabrielach from Amite High School who won a \$500 dollar scholarship on College Goal Sunday is pictured with Southeastern Louisiana University Assistant Director of Financial Aid, Tara Laborde.

Below: College Goal Sunday volunteers help students and their parents fill out FAFSA forms online.



Louisiana GEAR UP Nominates Alumni to the GEAR UP Leadership Academy

The GEAR UP Alumni Leadership Academy (GUALA) is a new initiative launched by the National Council for Community and Education Partnerships with support from the national GEAR UP community and funding from The Kresge Foundation. The GUALA is a 12-month program designed to train and engage GEAR UP alumni in advocacy and leadership, and work toward creating positive change in education policy for their younger peers. The GUALA will select 30 GEAR UP Alumni Leaders annually from across the country and grow the program to one per state over time.

The GEAR UP Alumni Leaders will share personal experiences about the challenges of preparing for, applying to, and affording college. They will educate lawmakers about the importance and value of GEAR UP. GEAR UP Alumni Leaders will also articulate how the federal investment in them – an average of \$2,400 per student or \$400 per year over 6 years – will be returned to the community over the student's lifetime by earning a livable wage, paying increased taxes, strengthened citizen engagement, and better public health. Alumni Leaders will build their confidence and skills, and harness their leadership potential to become empowered, community-centered citizens.

Louisiana GEAR UP has nominated two alumni for selection, Timenee Thomas and Malcolm Smoot.



Thomas is a graduate of Bunkie High School in Bunkie, La. and holds a Bachelor of Science in Health and Physical Education from Louisiana Tech University. Her GEAR UP experience includes service as both a junior and senior camp counselor for Louisiana GEAR UP summer programs, multiple Rewards for Success scholarships, and

time as an Explorers' Club leader. Thomas is currently living the GEAR UP mission as a middle school teacher at Ruston Junior High School in Ruston, La.

"I am proud to say that I was a part of such an influential program because of the many opportunities and resources, such as the summer camps and Rewards for Success scholarships, I was provided," Thomas said. "In addition, I am thankful for having the chance to set myself on a positive and assured path through high school and college, so that I may give back and provide those same things to those that follow."



Smoot, also a graduate of Bunkie High School and a Gates Millennium Scholar, is currently in his last semester at Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, La. He plans to graduate in May of 2013 with both a Bachelor of Science in Music (vocal performance) and a Bachelor of Science

in Music Education (vocal music education) after successfully completing his teaching internship at Avoyelles Public Charter School. Smoot is also the recipient of multiple Rewards for Success scholarships, a former Explorers' Club leader, and has served as both a junior and senior camp counselor.

"I feel that LA GEAR UP was instrumental to my journey toward college," Smoot said. "It is important to give back and to encourage students who, like me at one time, think that college is only a dream."



Applications Being Accepted for John R. Justice Student Loan Repayment Program

The Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA) is currently accepting applications for the John R. Justice Student Loan Repayment Program.

The John R. Justice Student Loan Repayment Program in Louisiana provides for the payment of eligible educational loans (both Federal Family Education Loan Program [FFELP] and Federal Direct Loans) for state and federal public defenders and state prosecutors employed in Louisiana who agree to remain employed as public defenders and prosecutors for at least three years.

This year there are six available awards for public defenders with a proposed award amount of \$5,000 and 12 available awards for prosecutors with a proposed award amount of \$2,500. Actual award amounts will be finalized at the March 11 meeting of the Louisiana Student Financial Assistance Commission (LASFAC).

The application is now available and the deadline to apply is April 30, 2013. To check eligibility requirements or to apply, visit http://www.osfa.la.gov/index.jsp?SRC=/jrjustice.htm. There is no paper application for the award; the online application is the only accepted application.



LOSFA Holds Annual Call-In Night

On Monday, February 19 LOSFA held its annual Call-In Night event. LOSFA representatives assisted 69 callers from 6 – 9 p.m. Questions were asked and answered on a variety of topics including TOPS, START, FAFSA, and College Goal Sunday. LOSFA also conducted a live Facebook chat during the same time period. The posted transcript was followed/viewed by 494 persons.



LOSFA representative Ebony Holmes assists a caller during LOSFA's Call-In Night event.

LOSFA's Social Media Sites



http://www.facebook.com/LOSFA



http://www.twitter.com/LOSFA



http://www.youtube.com/LOSFA1000



www.Flickr.com/LOSFA



For more information, contact the Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance:

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For submissions, opinions, or comments for LOSFA LOOP, please contact Gus Wales at Gus.Wales@la.gov.